

Hiding in Plain Sight: Women Warriors Throughout Time and Space. Christian P. Potholm. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021. xii + 257 pp. \$90. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9781538162712.

Warfare is an instrumental catalyst of change. Thus, it comes as little surprise that scholars of military history have often looked at the relationship between society and war. Scholars highlight great strategists and technological innovations that change the nature of warfare itself. This results in a narrative that discuss great leaders and major battles that focus on the conduct of warfare of a particular age, often neglecting to mention the number of women who served in equal capacity to their male counterparts. Expanding from his course “The Daughters of Mars,” Christian P. Potholm’s *Hiding in Plain Sight* compiles secondary source material of what military historians in recent years call “new military history,” which examines the role of women warriors who have often been marginalized in military historical narratives. In this work Potholm provides brief discussion and annotated bibliography that highlight examples of women warriors throughout a broad temporal and geographical lens, narrowing the scope of analysis within a more focused framework by separating these women by location, availability of source material, and archetype.

The work itself is divided into two parts. The first part, comprised of roughly fifty-five pages including notes, is rather brief and further breaks down into four subsections. The first subsection provides the reader with a brief discussion about what could be called the ontology of warfare, or the essence of war, though this is quickly dismissed as “not the subject of this book.” The topic is instead used to provide context for the points that follow. Potholm next examines how historians have, in the past, treated women in their analysis of war, often marginalizing women who served in major functionary roles and as combatants in favor of their male counterparts. It is also here that Potholm attempts to break down the reasons why there was a sudden growth in interest of women warriors with the larger objective of bringing together old and new discussions about the topic. Lastly, he attempts to broaden the scope of how historians have treated the archetype of the warrior by extending the definition to aristocratic elites, military strategists, and writers on war.

The last section provides a brief list of women warriors separated by geography, type, availability of secondary material, and those women warriors which interest him. Of these categories, it is distinction by typology that lends itself of true value as Potholm highlights cases where women served as combatants, defenders, commanders, authors, and peacekeepers among many other forms. Section two, which makes up most of this work, is an extensive annotated bibliography which is composed of scholarly and “popular” works primarily from the 1980s into the year of publication. Sorted alphabetically, the quality of annotation ranges greatly. Some of these entries are extensive and extremely informative about the work cited, but others seem far too brief and, as a result, are much less helpful. Potholm concludes the book by offering “One Word More.” Here he implores the reader, “Keep looking for women warriors. There are still many to be discovered, rediscovered, or highlighted. It’s your job now.”

That said, there are a number of points addressed by Potholm that need to be considered, specifically with regard to his framework and critiques toward scholars of military history. For

Potholm, the scholarly pursuits of prominent military historians such as John Keegan and Jeremy Black have neglected to consider critically the importance of marginalized women warriors. This he credits to the biases he believes that these scholars possess which resulted in Potholm's claim that "they have simply been ignored." Yet Potholm's reasoning here is rather unsatisfying, as those whom he targets for his critiques are not scholars who specialize in examining gender within the context of military history, nor do these scholars claim to be. Instead of engaging in the specifics of what historians are saying regarding the role of women and the archetype of warriors, Potholm instead opts for an oversimplified and perhaps idealized view of military history which fails to account for the actual discourse within the field. One must ask to what degree such debates such as "the military revolution" lend themselves to a gendered assessment. One could also argue that Potholm's work requires a degree of evaluation concerning how the warrior archetype is constructed. For Potholm, the scope of who fits within this category is rather broad and inclusive, allowing for strategists and rulers to define themselves as warriors. However, this categorization is rather unsatisfactory, as it fails to account for how societies formulated and how contemporaries viewed and understood martial culture and its practitioners. Furthermore, not only is this ahistorical, but by extending the categorization of warrior to strategists and rulers, the concept becomes diluted and provides little value to the larger analysis being made.

For scholars and students interested in the role of women warfare looking to this work for an in-depth argument or assessment of women warriors within a historical context they are bound to be disappointed. This work is a conglomeration of short essays and an annotated bibliography. Essentially, he is asking readers to do the work themselves. However, as a resource for researching secondary literature or the structuring of an undergraduate research seminar, this work certainly possesses great value. Indeed, this work is better suited for instructors to use as a potential framework to structure a course or even special lectures pertaining to women warriors. It would also be of use to graduate students who are taking comprehensive exams that include this subject. Beyond this, however, no larger comprehensive discussion is provided to highlight the historiographical debates. Thus, unless one is well versed in the field, it is up to the reader to identify the larger arguments being made elsewhere. In that sense, it would be of less value to the undergraduate whom Potholm states as his main audience.

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